

EDITED BY PROFESSOR BENJAMIN FARRE

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COMMUNISM AND LIBERTY

RODNEY HILTON

ONE SHILLING AND THREEPENCE NET



COMMUNISM AND LIBERTY

By Rodney Hilton

MARXISM TODAY SERIES

EDITED BY

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FOREWORD

THE effort to conceal the dictatorship of monopoly capital in our nominally democratic society characterises all our major organs for the formation of public opinion. Only the Communist Party consistently fights to expose this obscurantism and to base human freedom on a thorough understanding of the nature of human society. In clear and simple terms, Mr. Rodney Hilton pursues this serious purpose. His essay is urgent and topical. Only by deepening our understanding of society can we resist the capitalist drive to war, which seeks to conceal the reality of greed under the pretence of freedom.

B. FARRINGTON.

COMMUNISM AND LIBERTY

I

THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERTY TO-DAY

We live to-day at one of the greatest turning points in human history. Tremendous movements of human beings the whole world over are abolishing established social orders, some of which have seen little change for centuries. Together with the colonies of modern imperialism, layer upon layer of the old feudal and pre-feudal orders of Asia are being swept away by movements of national and social liberation. In what were the most backward parts of Europe, workers and peasants, liberated from home-grown despotism and foreign intervention, are laying the foundations of socialism. In those parts of Europe and America where power is still in the hands of the imperialists, the workers are hammering on the doors of the privileged, strengthened by the success of their comrades in the Soviet Union, in the new democracies, in China and elsewhere.

This world-wide movement for the emancipation of all sections of society oppressed by imperialism is led in all countries by the most advanced and disciplined of classes, the working class. The working class itself is led by its general staff, the Communist Parties, which are therefore directing the general movement of emancipation. The Communists are in this position of leadership because their actions are guided by the most comprehensive social science of our time, Marxism, as well as by the lessons learnt in more than a century of the workers' struggle for socialism. Most of all they owe to the example of the working people of the Soviet Union in their achievement of socialism and their advance on the road to communism, again under the leadership of the Communist Party.

It is not only the working class and its allies who understand the significance of this turning point in history. The old ruling classes, whether in Washington, London, Delhi or Tokio, understand it too. And consequently they are fighting as doomed

classes always fight to retain their property, their privileges and their power—with ferocity, without pity and without scruple.

We can see plainly how world imperialism, under the leadership of the U.S.A., prepares its military and political resistance to social change in its Truman Doctrine, its Marshall Plan, its Atlantic Pact, and the universal arming of reaction. But the resistance is also organised, often not so clearly, in the realm of ideas. As the battle becomes fiercer in the realm of things, so it is becoming more intense in that of ideas, so that to-day, more than at any other time, it is essential for the working-class movement to advance in the battle of ideas, to seize the enemy's weapons and to turn them against him.

Lenin foresaw many years ago that democracy as the political superstructure of competitive capitalism would necessarily be attacked by the ruling class in the era of monopoly capitalism. As the general crisis of capitalism developed, the rulers of the imperialist states deliberately undermined the structure of political democracy which they had inherited from their fathers (a structure which had at no time been extended to the colonies). In some countries they resorted to open fascist dictatorship, in others, to politer forms of reaction, such as the British Emergency Powers Act, combined with an encouragement of fascist movements abroad. Between the wars the theorists of capitalism openly attacked political democracy and praised autocracy. Some of these theorists frankly proclaimed their support for fascist régimes and political parties; many were advancing similar views under the cloak of religion or idealist philosophy. They ridiculed the rationalism of nineteenth-century liberalism and said that political action must be directed by the mystical urgings of the instincts. They spoke of the master race, proclaiming the doctrine (inherent in all forms of imperialism) that some peoples are destined to rule and others to be ruled.

In the deepest period of capitalist crisis between the wars, fascist doctrines were imposed with some success on considerable sections of the middle class and even on some sections of the workers, as in Germany. The military and political victories of fascism in Greece, Spain and elsewhere in Europe during the period of appeasement vastly extended the propaganda

resources of fascism. But the anti-fascist war which the people of Europe have just fought was a great deal more than simply a military operation. It was a period of profound political education, during which the doctrines of fascism were exposed and understood for what they meant in practice—an open terroristic dictatorship of monopoly capital. Because of the democratic content of the anti-fascist war, the imperialists are now making a last attempt to exploit the democratic sentiments of the people, in order to achieve mass support in their resistance to the advance of socialism. Every reactionary trend in modern politics now dons the mantle of 'liberal democracy,' with the result that it is scarcely possible to distinguish between a speech, an article or a wireless talk by a Conservative of the extreme Right and one by a pseudo-Left of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Communists understand the great significance, for both workers and wide sections of the middle class, of political democracy. Particularly do they understand that in the one word, 'liberty,' are epitomised many of the finest popular aspirations. They also know that it is not an abstract quality which never changes, that its real meaning has changed, and is changing. But in the hands of those who try to make an abstraction out of it, it is being used to destroy all that it has ever meant, and can mean for us in the future.

II

LIBERTY IN ITS HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

It used to be thought by some early Christian writers and by theorists of the bourgeois revolution (such as Rousseau), that primitive men enjoyed a liberty which was taken away from them when organised class society succeeded primitive tribal communism. Although there is a kernel of truth in this idea, it is incomplete because it was based on the conception (dear to the bourgeoisie) that liberty is merely an absence of restraint. As we shall see, no satisfactory conception of liberty in society can be arrived at unless it includes positive rights and privileges. If this is so, while primitive man in tribal society may not

have been oppressed by his fellows, since class exploitation did not exist, he was not free in relation to nature because he had no power over nature. The material basis for rights and privileges did not exist.

Early tribal societies were at the mercy of natural forces because of the lack of productive technique and of understanding of nature. Man's freedom in relation to nature depends on the extent to which he understands nature, and is therefore able to control natural forces to his own advantage—in Michurin's phrase, 'to wrest favours from nature.' For this reason, the New Stone Age saw a tremendous leap forward in human progress. Tribal societies now began to produce their food by sowing grain and domesticating animals in addition to merely gathering wild fruits and hunting wild animals, as they had done before. An element of deliberate planning entered into social production as it became possible to create, and to anticipate, an annual surplus of food over basic subsistence requirements. In relation to nature, then, man's freedom was rapidly extended as he increased his power over nature. It was on this material basis alone that the rights which compose *political* liberty in class society could exist.

But at the same time began a dilemma, to-day for the first time capable of resolution, in both the practical achievement and the formulation of liberty. Man's control over his environment, and the social product at his disposal, increased, not only as a result of the division of labour in primitive society, but as a result of the division of society into exploiting and exploited classes. The growth of the material conditions for liberty was only possible as a result of the break-up of the primitive communism of tribal society. This resulted in the alienation from the exploited producer of the surplus which made possible the liberty of the exploiting classes—slave-owners, feudal lords and capitalists. And in consequence, liberty was denied to the slaves, the serfs and the proletarians, as part of the very historical process which saw an increase in the potential conditions of liberty. To-day the dilemma can be clearly seen: only through the long and painful experience of class society, in which liberty is a class monopoly, can mankind stand on the threshold of the achievement of liberty for all.

The very concept of liberty emerges from the manifold conflicts of class society. In ancient society a man was called 'free' to distinguish him from the slaves. The actual word 'liberty' gradually acquired a new significance in the long period of European feudalism, as the generalised expression for all the aims of the separate social groups and classes. It embraced the right to property, the right to exploit, as well as the right not to be exploited; it included the right to conserve protective traditions, and to renew and extend traditional rights; the right to the possession of an ideology or the practice of a religion, as well as the right to annihilate the culture and ideology of class or national enemies. But though the word 'liberty' was used as a general term to describe all these rights, in pre-capitalist society the concept remained a very concrete expression of class privileges.

This concreteness is well illustrated in our own Magna Carta, a document often called the Charter of English liberties. It embodied, in fact, a series of concessions forced from King John in 1215 by the leaders of the English feudal nobility, and was henceforth regarded by them as the essential statement of *their* liberties. It was a very precise document. Each clause laid down with great exactness the degree to which the nobility would allow the government to encroach on their local powers; how they were to be tried in courts of law; what taxes they should pay and what military service perform. Each one of them, whether baron or bishop, possessed certain clearly defined powers of exploitation in areas of private jurisdiction where the bulk of his landed property lay. Such a conglomeration of privileges was also known as a 'liberty'. Such a liberty, of course, like the 'liberties' of Magna Carta, had no reference to the servile peasants, the majority of the population, except in so far as these privileges strengthened the lords' powers of exploitation. Similarly, the merchants who ruled the town corporations had their privileges which enabled them to enforce local trade monopolies. These privileges were also known as 'liberties'.

So the main class divisions in feudal society were embodied in a complex of what Marx and Engels refer to in *The Communist Manifesto* as 'numberless indefeasible chartered

freedoms.' In the period of feudal expansion such liberties were a means by which in fact the inherent tendencies towards anarchy were controlled. But as the productive forces from which capitalism was to develop expanded, these local, cellular forms of the political, social and economic organisation of the feudal nobility became a restrictive force. Local feudal liberties had to be smashed, together with the social order of which they were an expression. Nevertheless, feudal liberties represent an extremely important stage in the development of the concept of liberty. They show that liberty consisted of concrete privileges by which classes and groups within classes could control their society. And not the least important of these rights was the right to exploit.

In smashing what had become a decayed and restrictive form of society, the bourgeoisie also extended and generalised the concept of liberty in two respects. Firstly, we owe the existence both of modern nation-states and of the concept of national unity and independence to the bourgeois revolutionary movement. Here the bourgeoisie gave political expression to the attempt it was making to create a national market. It is, of course, true that the bourgeois theory and practice of national freedom did not exclude the freedom of one bourgeois state to exploit other nations. The enslavement of Ireland was one of the first fruits of the English Revolution.

Secondly, the bourgeoisie during its revolutionary phase extended its concept of freedom beyond its own ranks.

Both the English Revolution of the seventeenth century and the French Revolution of the eighteenth century were movements in which the bourgeoisie was the advanced class, leading allies from all the other classes which were oppressed by the feudal absolutist state—peasants, shopkeepers, small artisans. It was not only the bourgeoisie, but, as John Milton put it, 'this iron flail, the people, that drove the bishops out of their chairs and gave us what we most desired.'

The leading sections of the bourgeoisie in England in 1649 were the capitalist gentry, the merchants and some of the industrial capitalists. In seizing the state power they were concerned to smash the fetters which restricted the development of capitalist production. In the interests of their class they

fought for freedom of speech, for freedom from arbitrary arrest, for freedom from arbitrary taxation, for freedom to organise in religious congregations. Since their allies from the petty bourgeoisie of town and country, who formed the core of the New Model Army, also wanted these freedoms, it was inevitable that the idea of liberty should be generalised so as to embrace all mankind. And so we find that Milton foreshadowed Rousseau when he wrote that

'no man who knows aught can be so stupid as to deny that all men were naturally born free,'

a sentiment that was expressed more pungently by an old Republican soldier, who said on the eve of his execution by the Royalist reaction:

'I am sure that there was no man borne, marked of God above another; for no one comes into the world with a saddle on his back, neither anyone booted and spurred to ride him.'

When the political power of feudalism was broken, the expansive forces which were to make industrial capitalism a world system were liberated. But the economic expansion of capitalism would not have been possible had not the dead weight of medieval scholasticism and the ecclesiastical control of ideas also been swept away. It was to achieve this as well that the revolutionaries of the seventeenth century fought for freedom of thought, speech, and publication. After the Revolution, bourgeois science, bourgeois art and bourgeois literature advanced in scope and profundity. They kept pace with the economic expansion of the capitalist order and later with the extension of bourgeois democracy at the expense of the relics of feudalism. The movement was begun in England. When it was beginning to ossify in our country under the eighteenth-century oligarchy of landowners and merchants, the further great impulse of the French Revolution of 1789 carried the movement forward again, not only in France but over all Europe.

By overthrowing the feudal absolutist state power, the bourgeoisie was, in effect, winning the battle for freedom, not only for itself, but for its allies among the petty bourgeoisie

and the workers. But bourgeois democracy, even at its fullest extent, could never transcend its class limitations. The English Levellers and the French Jacobins representing the extreme left of the bourgeois revolutionary alliance, attempted to carry bourgeois freedom further than the main forces of the bourgeoisie were prepared to go. Both the Levellers and the Jacobins were smashed in the interests of bourgeois property.

The dilemma, at the heart of bourgeois democracy from the very beginning was made more acute as industrial capitalism created the class which was to be its grave-digger—the industrial proletariat. The whole history of the nineteenth century shows us how the battle for democracy changed its class content. The bourgeois rights of freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, organisation and political representation had now to be fought for by the class which was bound to challenge the power of the bourgeoisie itself.

The whole structure of democratic rights as we know it to-day exists only by virtue of the sustained struggle of the working-class movement. Within the class-divided society which capital rules the rights once won by the bourgeoisie for themselves can now only be maintained by the determination of the working class; these rights are an essential weapon in the struggle for a freedom far higher than that of a bourgeois democracy, the freedom of socialism, which we shall discuss later.

III

CAPITALIST SOCIETY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

The dilemma of bourgeois democracy is that the capitalists in the process of struggle against feudal absolutism, created a set of ideas which they could not embody in practice, and which were to be turned against them. Before examining the immense gulf to-day between the professions and the practice of bourgeois democracy, let us consider for a few moments an important aspect of this dilemma as seen in bourgeois ideas about liberty.

Pre-capitalist conceptions of liberty, as we have seen, were very closely related to the concrete conditions of liberty. Similarly,

pre-capitalist political thought recognised the real nature of social relations in class society. Medieval thinkers did not suffer from the illusion that theirs was not a class-divided society. Their theory frankly recognised the subordination of the serf, the town artisan and the merchant to a landowning aristocracy.

Similarly, in the era of the bourgeois revolutions, the most generalised expressions about universal freedom were associated with the concrete freedoms for which capitalists were struggling in order to free themselves from feudal restrictions on production. Early bourgeois thinkers also recognised the class character, both of the social order they were attacking and of that which they sought to create. Hence Milton, arguing in favour of freedom from censorship for all sections of *revolutionary* opinion, was not in favour of such freedom for the Catholics, the propagandists of the international class enemy. This class analysis is also to be found in early writers on political economy, like Smith and Ricardo, and among historians and political theorists in France and England at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries.

The medieval illusion that the earthly social structure was a mirror of the heavenly order, and that this life is merely a preparation for that to come after death, helped to thwart movements of social revolt. Early capitalist society largely removed theology from politics, both by making religion the affair of the individual and by the more direct onslaught of materialist ideas. But in place of the illusion of a perfect life after death, bourgeois society fostered another illusion, which concealed the true nature of society as it exists. This illusion too, played its part in thwarting social revolt.

How did this illusion arise? What was its material basis?

A distinctive feature of capitalism is the vast extension of the production of commodities for the market. In pre-capitalist society, the majority of goods that men used were home-produced, and home-consumed, whilst to-day practically all the goods that we use have been bought and sold on the market. When capitalist theory began to be on the defensive, from about the middle of the nineteenth century, political economists

began to conceal the fact that social production involved a relationship between exploiting and exploited classes. They seized upon the obvious, surface features of the economic and social activity of their day—that is, the tremendous increase in the volume of commodities offered for sale on the national and international markets. Every form of human activity was described in terms of supply and demand. The roots of political and social activity in the class struggle could thus be concealed by the illusion referred to by Marx as ‘commodity fetichism.’ This illusion was to fulfil the same role for bourgeois society as religion had fulfilled for feudal society—the deception of the workers and the self-deception of the rulers.

‘Commodity fetichism’ did not only affect the bourgeois economists. It spread to the social and political theorists, to literary critics, to artists and to poets. Just as the economists portrayed capitalist and worker meeting freely as equals on the market, the one with his capital, the other with his labour, so the other theorists saw society as an accidental conglomeration of free and equal individuals. Such individuals might establish relationships with each other, but there was no compulsion, direct or indirect, forcing them to do so. Such an outlook, at best, approaches social life from the standpoint of the individual instead of seeing all the rich potentialities of human co-operation in society and man as ‘a political animal.’ At worst it involves a denial of society, a renunciation of action and of responsibility.

The atomisation of society into a collection of individuals can be seen in the earliest bourgeois theorists. In order to arrive at his conception of the coercive character of the state, Hobbes starts off from an atomic view of society. This remains true of the greatest bourgeois political theorists, such as Locke and Rousseau. In spite of this distorted perspective, early bourgeois theory recognises the class divisions in society. But after the decisive victory of capitalism over feudalism, the bourgeoisie was becoming concerned by the workers’ challenge to its power. The false and negative aspects of bourgeois theory became more and more emphasised. The illusion of capitalist society as a collection of free and equal individuals encouraged an exclusive concentration on the individual and a turning

away from the problems of society as irrelevant. The artist retreated to his ivory tower.

The retreat of the bourgeois artist or writer was a form of *self-deception*. As democratic competitive capitalism turned into imperialism, the realities of the world capitalist order in truth became horrible enough, and the feeling of responsibility for colonial oppression and mass poverty became sufficiently burdensome to afford some justification for this new form of withdrawal from the world. But as a necessary corollary to this *self-deception* of the bourgeois thinkers, was the *deliberate* deception of the masses which the leaders of the capitalist world carried to a hitherto unprecedented extent. The eighteen-nineties saw not only the flowering of the cult of the individual soul, but the beginning of the Yellow Press. As the British bourgeoisie embarked on the new phase of its career of colonial expansion which was to end in war, so it began to develop those means of mass propaganda which have reached such gigantic proportions to-day. Whilst the bourgeois intellectual sought an illusory freedom from the tensions of capitalist society in the pursuit of individual interests, the workers were to be diverted from too close an inspection of the crimes of imperialism by the concoctions of smut, crime and other forms of diversion, more or less innocent, compiled by Lord Northcliffe and other great press lords.

When the bourgeois propagandists of to-day attempt to turn artists and intellectuals, as well as the workers, away from socialism by anti-Soviet propaganda, it is to these false but deeply rooted ideas about the individual that they appeal. It is true that, in liberating the artist from dependence on aristocratic patrons and the writer from theological restrictions, the bourgeois revolution achieved a great step forward in the liberation of the human spirit. But there could be no greater mistake than for the artist or writer to believe, in these days of chronic capitalist crisis, that individual self-expression is not hopelessly thwarted by the more impersonal compulsions of the capitalist market. It is not merely that only a tiny proportion of young people can afford to develop their talents beyond the level needed for efficient employment in capitalist industry. Those who do acquire the training are for the most

part condemned to the frustration of the misuse of their talents. Artists advertise tooth paste or starve; writers are reduced to shoddy journalism and the propagation of an outlook on life approved by newspaper and publishing magnates; scientists invent instruments of death.

These artists, writers and scientists have no say in the direction in which capitalism guides their creative energies. How shameful, then, that the enemies of socialism should dare to speak of the control of thought and expression by the socialist state. It is under socialism, that for the first time in history, artists and writers find that they are completely integrated into society, and that in the building of this new society their work has as important a place as that of any of their fellow citizens.

The current misrepresentations about the position of the artist or writer in a socialist state are reinforced by the writings of bourgeois political theorists. There is, of course, a considerable variety of form in such writings. Some, for instance, are obliged to borrow some phrases and ideas from Marxism in order to pose as progressive. At the present time, however, the most influential trend is that which seeks to reduce all problems of man in relation to society to that of the conflict between authority and the individual. Here again society is reduced to the individual in the abstract as the common denominator. In this way, the most important aspect of the social structure, the relationship of classes, is disguised. The coercive power of the state becomes authority in the abstract. In this view, society is gutted of its real class content and the two abstractions, the individual and authority, are seen as polar opposites. Their reconciliation is posed as an insoluble problem, which must exist in any form of society.

We must recognise that the problem for the bourgeois philosopher, or at any rate for the honest one, is a real one. Hé, and those who accept his theories, are aware that individuals are oppressed and deprived of their freedom by the state authority. But since society is reduced to the two polar opposites, authority and the individual, they cannot conceive that authority has any origin except in society as a whole, in the sum-total of individuals. In their minds, the state becomes the

necessary enemy of all individuals, but since the existence of classes has been concealed, in effect the state becomes neutral as between classes.

IV

THE DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT

Marxism solves the problem, not only for the philosopher, but for the artist, the writer and the scientist. Authority in class society is not an abstraction which can be counterposed against the individual. The state power consists of armed forces, policemen, magistrates, and bureaucrats. It has been created by the class which owns the means of production in order to guarantee the continued exploitation of the other classes in society who do not. This is the basic function which in capitalist society is performed by a whole variety of state forms—bourgeois republic, constitutional monarchy, fascist dictatorship, or the 'Welfare State' as it functions to-day.

In socialist society the state power is the dictatorship of the proletariat. Here too its function is to protect the interests of the classes which own the means of production. Here too, the form of the state can vary considerably, according to historical and political circumstances, as we see when we compare the Soviet Union with the New Democracies, and as we shall see again and again as new socialist states are formed. In socialist societies, however, the ruling class is no longer an exploiting minority of the population, but the vast majority—a non-exploiting majority which increases in size until it includes the whole population. It is only in such a society that conflict between individuals and society begins to disappear. Here workers, artists and intellectuals become the rulers of society together, and the product of each, whether it is a tool or a symphony, is valued according to the extent to which it contributes to the happiness of society as a whole. Socialism is a period of preparation during which men replace habits of competition and acquisition learnt in class society, by habits of social co-operation. The aims of individuals, whatever the character of their creative activity, become more and more

integrated, as the vestigial remains of class society disappear. Finally, when communism is achieved, and the danger of foreign counter-revolutionary intervention no longer exists, the power of the state becomes unnecessary.

In Marx's words—

'The free development of each is the condition of the free development of all.'

The Marxist conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat is of fundamental importance in communist theory and practice. It is a conception which has been more misrepresented by the enemies, and even by the friends, of communism than most of the other fundamental concepts of Marxism. It is in fact a perfectly natural consequence of the analysis of class society.

However much the most formally democratic bourgeois state appears to be based on the consent of the people, it nevertheless remains a dictatorship of the capitalists as a class. In this sense the word 'dictatorship' means, of course, rule with the sanction of coercion by police, judiciary, and military power. It does not mean the rule of a single individual. The coercive character of class rule in bourgeois society is not always prominent. A number of different historical circumstances, singly or in combination, have had the effect of disguising the essentially dictatorial character of the bourgeois state. Most important perhaps has been the existence of conditions which have enabled the bourgeoisie to give economic and social concessions to leading sections of the working class and to the intermediate strata of society—professional, clerical and administrative workers. In this way, class conflicts have sometimes been temporarily mollified. The domination of the world market during the greater part of the nineteenth century enabled the British capitalist class to make a series of concessions to the various ruled sections of the population, without the rulers abandoning any real power. The exploitation of the colonial empire, first through unashamed looting, then by the manipulation of the terms of trade in the interests of British exports, and finally by the direct capitalist exploitation of colonial workers has enabled British capitalism to continue

this policy almost to the present day. It is from the super-profits of imperialism that the British ruling class has been able to maintain its docile aristocracy of labour and its vast middle class of small traders, middlemen, technicians, and bureaucrats.¹ It is to no small extent due to the diminution of the area of colonial exploitation that the latest attempt to disguise the irreconcilable class conflict in capitalist society—Labour's Welfare State—is proving so catastrophically unsuccessful.

A policy of concession implies that the ruling class was obliged to yield to some of the demands of the ruled. Latter-day political democracy—the counterpart in the political sphere of economic concessions—has been won precisely by that process of class struggle which the apologists of capitalism pretend has disappeared *because* of political democracy. A study of the history of all capitalist states, particularly the imperialisms, shows that the policy of concession as a means by which the bourgeois dictatorship has been maintained, has been inextricably bound up with open class struggle in which force has been used. But whilst repression has alternated with concession even during the most 'democratic' periods of bourgeois rule, the history of world capitalism since the first world war has shown that capitalist classes are also prepared if necessary to make repression and the total abandonment of democratic forms a matter of consistent policy. This is the meaning of fascism as it was between the wars, and as it is being revived in the capitalist world to-day.

It is clearly not due to any defect of the bourgeoisie as individuals that their rule is a class dictatorship. This was also true of pre-capitalist class societies, such as those of the ancient and medieval worlds. In the slave societies of Greece and Rome, the state was an instrument in the hands of the slave-owners by which they guaranteed their ownership and control of the means of production. The state forms of feudal Europe, which varied considerably from country to country, and during the thousand odd years that feudalism lasted were all forms of the dictatorship of the landed nobility by which it

¹ Not only the bureaucrats in the state apparatus, but the even vaster army of bureaucrats of private enterprise.

guaranteed its income, derived directly or indirectly from the exploitation of serfs.

Now, when the bourgeoisie as a class is overthrown by the working class and deprived of its power and its property, society does not by that act become classless. In the first place, there still exist important class distinctions among the hitherto exploited sections of society. Industrial workers, small shopkeepers, self-employed artisans, and peasants have many interests in common—more than the majority of them have ever had in common with the bourgeoisie. But they also have distinct and in some cases conflicting interests. Secondly, the expropriated bourgeoisie does not lose its class consciousness by being deprived of its ownership and control of the means of production. On the contrary, its class consciousness is considerably increased. It does not accept defeat; it attempts to regain its lost power.

If the bourgeoisie of a country where the workers have taken power were isolated, they would be of little danger to the new socialist society. They would have no chance of persuading the workers whom they had been exploiting to give them back the means of continuing to exploit. But in fact the dispossessed bourgeoisie is not isolated. It attempts first of all to win over to its side the middle strata of the population. The peasants, the small proprietors of all kinds, the professional classes who have received bourgeois education and absorbed bourgeois ideas, are all susceptible to the propaganda of the dispossessed class. When industry is socialised, many years have still to pass before the small proprietors in town and country become convinced of the need for social ownership in their own sphere. Because of the individual character of the economy to which they are still bound, they are unable to develop to the same extent as the workers the outlook of co-operation for the common good. They long continue to think in individualist and acquisitive terms, and are therefore peculiarly susceptible to the propaganda which the big bourgeoisie—whose interests are in fact incompatible with theirs—continues to spread.

More serious, the dispossessed bourgeoisie has allies abroad. In countries which are still capitalist, the ruling class does not stop short at increasing the oppression of its own workers, for

fear they in turn may seize power. They also help their expropriated brothers abroad because they realise the dangerous contagion of example. They organise wars of intervention, with the dispossessed native bourgeoisie as a fifth column, as in Russia after the Revolution or as in Spain between 1936 and 1939. They organise espionage and sabotage, as world capitalism has done consistently in every socialist country since the establishment of the Soviet Republics. The main hope they have for success is in the remaining members of the capitalist class in the socialist countries, and in elements of the population sufficiently unstable to be susceptible to bribes or to propaganda appeals to ancient prejudices nurtured in class society. In the last resort, they may, like Hitler, resort to war on a world scale—to which end a considerable amount of their espionage is directed. But the capitalists of the world are becoming somewhat wary of war as a solution to their difficulties. They are not unaware of the vast extension of the socialist sector of the world which has resulted from the last two world wars they have waged, and of the increasing strength of purpose of the peoples of the still-capitalist world who refuse to accept war as a solution.

Socialist countries are fully justified in maintaining a powerful state machine of their own for the defeat of these attempts at counter-revolution. They are fully justified, if necessary, in increasing the strength of the repressive apparatus at the disposal of the workers. It is well known that defeated and dispossessed ruling classes fight for the restoration of their privileges with a desperation, cruelty and absence of restraint which has never characterised even the most primitive and hopeless revolts of the exploited.

The repressive apparatus in the hands of the workers in a socialist state has a characteristic which exists in other class societies. It is that the repressive features of state action do not affect the whole of society. Whilst it is true that under capitalism, individual capitalists may well be arrested, tried and punished for criminal offences, capitalists in general know that the policeman is their friend. He exists to protect their property, their status as the rulers of society. When the very structure of society seems to the capitalists to be in a state of

dissolution, through strikes and political agitations, the whole of the forces of coercion are mobilised against the working class on behalf of the capitalists. No worker who has experienced the action of the police during strikes and demonstrations, and who has observed the tenderness with which the activities of fascists and other anti-Semitic and right-wing bodies are treated, can doubt that the repressive apparatus of the state aims to restrict his freedom of action and to guarantee the freedom of action of the ruling class.

Similarly, under socialism the state power guarantees the freedom of action of the new rulers of society. The freedom of workers and their allies to build socialism is clearly hindered by the attempts of the expropriated bourgeoisie to win back, with the aid of foreign capitalist governments, its lost power and its now-socialised property. Since the reason of the workers is not, and cannot be, the reason of the capitalists, the capitalists will not listen to reason. They must be coerced. But the repression of the capitalist counter-revolution in all its forms (both material and ideological) not only does not result in the generalisation of oppression. It is a necessary condition for the growing freedom of the vast majority of the population. Then, as more and more of the waverers, and even of the old ruling class, are won over to share the building of the new society, so the repressive aspect of the workers' state diminishes until the only remaining organs of force are those by which the people protects its socialist society against the threats of the capitalist world outside.

There is a great quantitative increase in freedom in a socialist society. This is because the ruling class, the class owning the means of production, is now the majority of the population instead of a minority, as under capitalism. There is also a deep, qualitative transformation of the freedom which is enjoyed. To become the ruling class does not only mean to be freed from exploitation. It also means participating actively in the government of society. In the most democratic bourgeois states, the worker has won the right to vote for one of two or three persons, the most successful of whom will then sit as his representative in Parliament or in the local government body. But the worker does not genuinely control the conditions of

his own life by exercising his vote in this way. The 'representative' in Parliament or local council will in fact act on behalf of his own class interests or the interests which the party machine controlling him represents, not those of his constituents; and the constituents will have no right to recall him to account for his actions, as in Soviet democracy. Even if the central or local government representative is an honest fighter for the interests of the workers who elect him, his powers of action on behalf of his constituents are narrowly confined. For the most important part of a worker's life is beyond his own control as well as beyond the control of his representative, even supposing that representative to be genuine.

This most important part of a worker's life is his daily work, the way he earns his living, the most formative influence on his general outlook. So long as a body of capitalists, privately or through the state, govern the factories, the mines, the shops, and the warehouses, the worker cannot be free. But when he and his comrades become, not only the owners, but the governors from hour to hour, day to day, and year to year of their factories and all the places where they work, then their life is utterly changed.

Experience of popular life in the Soviet Union and the New Democracies has shown that this direct personal control by every individual, in co-operation with his fellows, results in a complete change in a man's outlook on life. The eager and willing administration of that which is his own does not stop at the factory or the workshop. It extends to the whole of public life. The work of local and central government is no longer the responsibility of a few full-time officials, or officially elected deputies, but of the whole population. In the Soviet Union, ever since the railway workers of Moscow organised voluntary labour for the speeding up of socialist construction (the *subbotnik* movement of May, 1919), the spheres in which Soviet citizens contribute voluntarily to the work of local and central government have constantly enlarged. It is in this spirit of the free and co-operative participation of the working people in running their own country that the New Democracies have been able to achieve miracles of reconstruction. It is this spirit diffused throughout the whole of this new, and constantly

growing, ruling class of workers which makes the dictatorship of the proletariat the most democratic régime that the world has known since the beginning of class society. The 'freedom of the individual' under the dictatorship of the proletariat is immensely extended as regards the number of people who enjoy this freedom, and as regards the very quality of such freedom. This new freedom is that of the whole people to build a new society together. It is a freedom which has almost nothing in common with the class freedoms of the past, whose principal component was the freedom to exploit.

The leading Marxist thinkers, from the founders of Marxism onwards, have never allowed themselves to make detailed prophecies about what a communist society would be like. But they have not hesitated to define its principal characteristics. Lenin was careful to make a very clear distinction between socialism, the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and communism, when the need for any form of class—that is, coercive—rule has disappeared. The cardinal feature of communism is that the state has disappeared, or, in Engels' words, has 'withered away.' When we consider the reasons why this should happen, we may also make some deductions about what sort of a society in other ways this would be. For the disappearance of the state as a 'government of persons' implies the final disappearance of class distinctions in society. It implies the final disappearance of the social habits born in class society which hinder complete human co-operation for the common good. This implies a profound change in human nature, the sort of completely changed attitude to life which William Morris tried to describe in his *News from Nowhere*.

In a society such as this, many of the conflicts and distinctions even of socialist society, let alone of capitalist society will have disappeared. The social distinctions between men and women will no longer exist. Town and country will no longer be distinct, uncomprehending worlds. The industrial worker and the intellectual, the mental and the manual worker, will no longer be sharply distinguishable types. This is not to say, of course, that all problems will have been solved and all conflicts resolved. Ever new problems will have to be faced,

but they will be of a different order from those that face us in capitalist or socialist society. Contemporary problems are, on the whole, political problems, for even those which seem on the surface to have little to do with politics will usually be found to be at least strongly affected by political issues. But in a communist society, when conflicting classes have disappeared, and with them the antagonism between mental and physical labour, social and material problems will present themselves entirely differently. Their solution will be found by men and women with an intellectual development far higher than we can now conceive.

This point bears considerably on the problem under discussion. Liberty is in class society at root a social and political problem, though it has immense consequences in art, literature and thought. Liberty in a *socialist* society is completely different, both as a concept and as realised in life, from what it is in a capitalist or pre-capitalist society. This is because power over the life of society by the working majority of society brings about a real qualitative transformation of life and of the very meaning of the word 'freedom.' But we still think of freedom under socialism as power, even though this power is in the hands of a vast and increasing majority. Under *communism*, however, power, in the context of social relations, becomes meaningless. And for this reason, freedom, which has meant so many different things during the changing epochs of human history, will also cease to have any significance.

V

OUR FREEDOM

Gerrard Winstanley, three hundred years ago, wrote:

'Everyone talks of freedom, but there are few that act for freedom, and the actors of freedom are oppressed by the talkers and verbal professors of freedom.'

To-day, too, the verbal professors of freedom appear in their numbers, in the press, on the radio, and in the meeting-halls. Their theories, like any others, must be tested in practice. They

must not be allowed to excuse the non-realisation of their declared aims by proclaiming that at any rate they are striving in the right direction. For in practice we can see that it is in the opposite direction that they are moving.

In Strasbourg in the summer of 1949 a motley collection of Tories, clerical reactionaries and social-democrats attempted to embody their professions of freedom in a programme of human rights. We know, of course, that the real purpose of the so-called European Assembly is to organise the capitalist counter-offensive against the socialist sector of the world. The programme of human rights is simply one of the devices by which the participants seek to conceal their real aims. But such devices have their dangers for them and their use for us, since through them, we can point out the gulf between professions and performance.

The Strasbourg freedoms were the subject of some debate even among their sponsors. But the rivals agreed on a formula as follows: 'freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly and association, freedom to marry and found a family, and freedom for parents to concern themselves with the education of their children.' Governments were also asked to hold, *particularly in their metropolitan territories*,¹ elections at frequent intervals on the basis of universal suffrage and through secret ballot, so as to ensure that legislation and actions of governments are in accordance with 'the people's will'. They were also asked 'to agree not to hinder criticism or political opposition' (*The Times*, August 31st, 1949).

One of the most significant phrases in this document is that which implicitly limits the obligation to hold elections to metropolitan territories. It is significant because the men at Strasbourg were not simply representatives from European states. They are the rulers of the whole of the world's colonial empires, operating under the not very remote control of that residuary legatee of all colonial empires, the government of the United States. At the very moment when these Morrisons and Churchills, Schumans and Spaaks were discussing the Strasbourg freedoms, the armed forces of Britain, France, and Holland were occupied precisely in quelling movements

¹ My italics.—R. H.

expressing the people's will in Malaya, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

Every Briton, every citizen of the metropolitan countries of the capitalist empires, has political responsibilities beyond his own country. British capitalism still draws a vast quantity of tribute from its overseas empire, and consequently British liberties, standard of life, education, and culture must be judged as they obtain over the whole of this empire. The fact that the Communist Mayor of Famagusta in Cyprus was fined £200 for making an un-licensed reference to politics in a speech—that British troops are burning Malayan villages and deporting whole populations—that in British-dominated Iraq the leader of the Communist Party was executed simply for being a Communist—these are as much tests of the practice of Western democracy as if they happened in London, Birmingham or Manchester.

Political oppression has its economic roots. Such acts as the shooting of demonstrating ex-servicemen in the Gold Coast and miners on strike in Nigeria are the necessary means by which imperialism maintains its methods of exploitation, an exploitation which in itself makes a mockery of the Strasbourg freedoms. It is an exploitation which distorts the natural economic life of whole nations, smashing the delicate balance of agriculture and village industry in order to provide cheap labour for plantations and mines. It separates menfolk from their families and stifles unborn generations. It pitilessly destroys the natural qualities of the soil in the search for quick profits. In place of the folk cultures of the shattered tribal communities, imperialism gives nothing, unless, to quote Professor Hamilton's recent *History of the Homeland*, it is 'the education and training which befits an unskilled labourer, this being the lowly lot assigned to the native population by the white settler.'

But according to Mr. Bevin, imperial rule is necessary to preserve the 'Western' way of life in the metropolitan countries. Can we even say, however, that in denying freedom to the colonial peoples, the capitalists of Europe have guaranteed the Strasbourg freedoms to their own workers—or are likely to do so in the future? What hypocrisy to talk of freedom of opinion and expression in face of the capitalist monopoly of 99 per

cent. of all of the means of expression! Where is the freedom of religion when Catholics may be excommunicated for political acts which have nothing to do with religion? The freedom of assembly is most precious when workers have most need to meet to defend their rights. But it is at precisely such a time that the Emergency Powers Act is brought into operation, and that workers' demonstrations against reviving fascism are forbidden. Trade union freedom is attacked by armed force in Northern France and Italy, and by the more hypocritical methods of English social-democracy, when the rulers of the biggest trade union deny the workers' rights to elect whom they wish to represent them. What is the good of proclaiming the freedom to marry and found a family when young people are denied the houses in which they can live together, so as to pay for a foreign policy which would end in destroying any children they bring into the world? It is no new thing for parents to *concern* themselves with the education of their children, but the freedom to do this means nothing when the schools are too full to hold them or to educate them decently, and when the best education is still a commodity to be bought with money.

The Strasbourg Assembly is as impotent as a fly on the wheel of history, but it mirrors the sordid reality of contemporary bourgeois freedom. In an assembly which demands elections to voice the peoples' will, and affirms the right of political opposition, the parties which represent the vast majority of Europe's working class have no representatives. The Communists are excluded in principal from the charmed circle of Western democracy, an act by which the bourgeoisie confirms that its democracy is a class democracy. Its rights, theoretically at the disposal of all, can only be used by the bourgeoisie. For as soon as capitalism reaches a critical stage in its economic and political development, it is obliged, for its own preservation, to deny freedom to the class which threatens to overthrow it. When freedom is denied to the Communists by the Western democrats in Washington, London and Strasbourg, by that act it is denied to the whole working class. The leader of the striking Bristol dockers, not a Communist, saw this when he said: 'Whenever a worker stands up for himself he is called a Communist.'

To-day, this fundamental identity of interest becomes much wider, so that we can say that the world movement which the Communists are leading does not mean simply the emancipation of the working class, but of the overwhelming majority of mankind.

By this we mean that only through the achievement of socialism can man, for the first time, consciously control the resources of society and the future movement of his own history. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the condition for humanity's passage from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. With all their immense technical resources and their great reserves of state power, the capitalist nations have never been able to achieve that control of nature and society without which there can be no freedom. Certainly, in the formulation of laws of natural science, which more and more approximate to true descriptions of reality, capitalist society has made great progress in the age-old struggle of man to submit nature to him. In so far as society has, through the understanding of scientific laws, been able to reap rewards from nature, man's potential freedom has been enlarged. But step by step with the development of technique, the thinkers of capitalism have become more and more mystified in face of the problems of human society.

The social and economic anarchy of capitalism has been mastered by neither the bourgeois theorists nor the bourgeois practitioners. As representatives of the ruling class, the theorists have been unable to formulate the scientific laws of society which would enable them to control society as they can control nature. None of the innumerable theories of the capitalist political economists about the nature of capitalist crises have enabled them to master crises. None of the social-democratic theories of the welfare state, and of the 'mixed economy' have enabled them, even when permitted by the bourgeoisie to sit in the thrones of power, to alter the basic conflict of worker and capitalist for the disposal of the social surplus. None of the constitutional and political theorists have been able to construct a political system in which, whatever the formal structure of equal rights and universal suffrage, the state power does not rest in the hands of the owners of the means of

production. Capitalist society is not in fact controllable by the capitalists themselves. Not only is the whole people oppressed under capitalism, but the bourgeoisie itself is caught in the meshes of the inevitable pattern of capitalist boom, capitalist slump, and capitalist war.

But the continuation of capitalism is not inevitable, and this is because of the critical formulation of the law of motion of capitalist society made by Marx and his followers. The Marxist analysis is not just another attempt to sort into a pattern the complexities of modern society. It is a method by which we can shape society to the only pattern which can ensure our future freedom. Marxism stands in relation to society as the scientific laws of the structure and development of matter stand in relation to nature. Neither for Marxism nor for the laws of natural science do we claim absolute, revealed truth, but both are developing and flexible instruments in the hands of man. Just as the engineer would be unable to build a bridge without a knowledge of the laws of mechanics, so the working class and its allies would be unable to build a new society without a knowledge of the laws of social movement contained in Marxism-Leninism.

Marxism shows that capitalist society is doomed to disintegration in ever more frequent cycles of economic and political crises. But it would not satisfy the needs of a humanity suffering from these crises if it did not show the way to end them. Here is the greatest contribution of Marxism; that it is a movement which promises hope for humanity as much as it is an analysis which forecasts disaster for capitalism. This hope is no utopian dream, but is rooted in the real conditions of modern society. Marxism at once designates the working class as the motive force which will lead the world from the impasse into which capitalism has dragged us, and provides the working class with its guide to action.

But while the working class must be the spearhead in the transformation of society, it cannot accomplish its task without winning to its side the overwhelming majority of the people. In this fight to win allies for the advance to socialism, the battle of ideas is of the first importance. It is essential, in the course of this battle, to show the people what liberty has meant in

practice, what it means now, and what it can mean in the future. If this can be done, the ruling class will be deprived of a major weapon in its ideological armoury.

In class society, liberty is inseparable from class privilege. The fight for liberty has always been the fight of the unprivileged to end the privileges monopolised by the class which owns the means of production. In the complex process of human history, this fight has brought about a continuous enrichment of the concept of liberty, especially during the period of the bourgeois democratic revolution against feudalism. But with the overthrow of feudal privilege, liberty still remained a class privilege. As monopoly capitalism has developed and has been challenged by the growing working-class and colonial liberation movements, it has become a class privilege so narrow that it is now only enjoyed by a minute section of the imperialist world.

But although in reality liberty has become so restricted, bourgeois education, bourgeois philosophy and bourgeois propaganda have impregnated popular thought with illusions about the freedom of the individual, which are used to disguise the real lack of liberty, and to discredit the socialist movement. The reality of class oppression and class conflict in the capitalist world is dissolved by verbiage about the problem of the individual in face of authority. The liberation of the vast majority of the population from class oppression by the socialist revolution, is concealed by false propaganda about the police state, forced labour, and the interference of the state in the private worlds of art and music.

In exposing the class basis of past and present ideas and realisations of liberty, Marxism shows that only by the abolition of class liberties and class privileges can the goal of a truly free society be achieved. In the Soviet Union and in the New Democracies we can see such a form of society growing before our very eyes, painfully, often with bitter set-backs, but at an ever increasing tempo. Where else in the world, when ever in the past, has there been such a release of individual initiative, of the free creative energy of the people as in these countries? Certainly, in what is sometimes thought of as the great age of individual enterprise, the period of *laissez-faire* capitalism,

there was nothing comparable. For *then* the enterprise of thousands was based on the exploitation of millions. The hand of each pushing entrepreneur was turned against his fellow. *Now*, under socialism, individual enterprise for the first time has a social aim and achieves its results in collective action.

The free society which we shall achieve through socialism will not come easily. Every day we are learning that the way there lies only through the most intense class struggle. History and present experience show that only through struggle can class privileges, class property and class power be abolished. Only in this way can the accumulated ideas of hundreds of years of class society and the reflection in men's minds of acquisitive, individualist capitalism be transmuted. This is something we are all learning and re-learning. It is a lesson which is of especial importance to those men of goodwill who want to live in a free society, but shrink from engaging themselves in the struggle to achieve it. They who are in a position to influence opinion, and thereby the course of history, who stand aside from the struggle, by that act betray the future they wish to see realised. But it is not our aim here simply to tell them so. It must be our aim now and afterwards, to explain, to convince, and to draw into action.

This is the only way in which we, in our day too, can weld the people into an iron flail, and win what we most desire.

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